

Message Text

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-----102213 070010Z /23

O P 062353Z OCT 77
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 240763

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: FUTURE POLICY ON BOAT CASES

REF: BANGKOK 22316

1. DEPARTMENT IS DISTURBED BY REPORT (REFTEL) THAT RTG IS HARDENING ATTITUDE TOWARD BOAT CASES. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THAI FEEL OVERWHELMED BY PRESENT HIGH RATES OF REFUGEE INFLUX (BY LAND AND SEA) BUT BELIEVE THERE ARE STRONG ARGUMENTS TO BE MADE FOR RETENTION OF WHAT HAS BEEN A RELATIVELY QUITE HUMANITARIAN RTG APPROACH TO BOAT REFUGEES.

2. FIRST WE CONCUR WITH YOUR VIEW THAT PHASE II OF THE
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IPP BOAT CASE INTERVIEWS SHOULD BE ACCELERATED IN THAILAND TO PROVIDE TANGIBLE DRAWDOWN OF BOAT CASE POPULATION AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. INS/CO HAS CONCURRED IN THIS AND INS/HONG KONG WILL WORK OUT WITH YOU THE MOST SUITABLE SCHEDULE FOR SECOND ROUND OF BOAT CASE INTERVIEWS.

3. PRESUMABLY STIFF NEW POLICY RTG PLANS ON BOAT CASES
ALSO STEMS FROM FEAR THAT FUTURE BOAT CASES WILL NOT
FIND RESETTLEMENT IN THIRD COUNTRIES AND THAT BACKLOG

WILL ONCE AGAIN BUILD IN THAILAND. WE CAN MAKE NO
ASSURANCES WITH REGARD TO NEW ARRIVALS BUT WE ARE
EXAMINING WAYS IN WHICH THE UNITED STATES COULD CONTINUE
ACCEPTING SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF NEW BOAT CASE ARRIVALS.

4. DEPARTMENT BELIEVES FOLLOWING POINTS SHOULD BE MADE
TO THE RTG WITH A VIEW TO PERSUADING THEM TO SOFTEN
THEIR INTENTIONS ON BOAT CASE REFUGEES:

A. THE UNITED STATES IS NOT DROPPING THE BOAT CASE
PROBLEM UPON COMPLETION OF OUR 7000 PROGRAM. ON THE
CONTRARY, AN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE HAS BEEN CHARGED
WITH DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LONG RANGE POLICY
FOR THIS PROGRAM.

B. THE UNITED STATES WILL ACCELERATE ITS PLANS TO
MOVE THE BACKLOG OF INDOCHINESE BOAT CASE REFUGEES.
THIS SHOULD SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCE POPULATION OF THAI
BOAT CASE CAMPS BY EARLY 1978.

C. A TOUGHENING OF RTG POLICY ON BOAT CASES AND
THE CONSEQUENT SUFFERING AND LOSS OF LIFE THIS
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WOULD CAUSE DIRECTLY TO BOAT REFUGEES, AS WELL AS
THE EFFECT IT WOULD HAVE ON THE POLICIES OF OTHER
COUNTRIES, NOTABLY MALAYSIA, WOULD RESULT IN HEAVY
NEGATIVE PUBLICITY TO THE RTG WHICH WOULD CON-
SIDERABLY NEGATE THE HUMANITARIAN IMAGE THAT THE RTG
HAS UP TO NOW ENJOYED WITH REGARD TO THE TREATMENT
OF REFUGEES ARRIVING BY BOAT. AS STEPS ARE BEING
TAKEN TO RELIEVE THE THAI OF THIS BURDEN, A NEW
LESS HUMANE POLICY WOULD BE PARTICULARLY INCOMPRE-
HENSIBLE TO WORLD OPINION.

6. BELIEVE THESE POINTS SHOULD BE MADE TO DAMRONG AND,
IF APPROPRIATE, AT HIGHER LEVEL. PLEASE REPORT RTG
REACTION. CHRISTOPHER

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